

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 19, 2004.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN CORNYN, a Senator from the State of Texas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. CORNYN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The distinguished majority leader.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning we will have 30 minutes of debate prior to the cloture vote on the miscellaneous trade and technical corrections conference report. Therefore, I expect cloture to occur shortly after 10 a.m. I expect cloture to be invoked, and if it is invoked I hope we can complete the conference report in short order.

I will talk to the Democratic leadership after the vote to see what time may be necessary during that postcloture period.

I also expect the appropriations conference report, the so-called omnibus package, will be filed today. If so, I hope we will be able to act on that measure at some point today or this evening. I am optimistic that we can, in fact, finish our work sometime today and adjourn this Congress.

While we are waiting for the omnibus conference reports, we will continue to try to process other cleared legislative items. The IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act conference report, is expected to arrive today from the House, and we will consider that legislation before we adjourn this year.

Finally, we have a very large number of nominations that are available on the Executive Calendar. It would be irresponsible to leave without acting on at least those nominations which we know are noncontroversial. We must move toward resolution of these nominations over the course of the day. We need to continue to pursue a way of clearing that Executive Calendar.

I will close so we can move on for the vote, but I have to add that I personally had a remarkable day yesterday. I had the opportunity to visit the Clinton Library for what was an exceptional and remarkable day in terms of having our former Presidents together in a wonderful bipartisan spirit. It was a rainy day so we all sat in 2 or 3 hours of the downpour. It really was an inspiration to see what has made and continues to make this country so great. It is a wonderful library. I have three boys and look forward to going back and taking them through a magnificent structure. It really does capture President Clinton's upbeat, optimistic

enthusiasm, his whole view of life. A number of the Senators attended. I wanted to mention it because it was quite remarkable for me, personally.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MISCELLANEOUS TRADE AND TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS ACT OF 2004—CONFERENCE REPORT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 1047, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Conference report accompanying the bill (H.R. 1047) to amend the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes divided in the following form: Senator GRASSLEY in control of 10 minutes; the Senator from Montana, Mr. BAUCUS, in control of 10 minutes; the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. FEINGOLD, for up to 8 minutes; and the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. KOHL, for up to 2 minutes.

The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I don't see Senator GRASSLEY, the chairman of the committee, in the Chamber. I expect him momentarily. In the meantime, I will say a few words with respect to the pending legislation.

I am pleased, frankly, that in the final days of the 108th Congress, the Senate is set to pass at long last the miscellaneous tariff bill. This bill reduces or eliminates tariffs on literally hundreds of products that U.S. companies use to make products in America. It is a collection of many bills too small to be considered independently, and, traditionally, Congress collects these inexpensive and noncontroversial bills together into one big omnibus bill which the Senate then passes by unanimous consent. That is our tradition in the Senate.

Unfortunately, that did not happen with this bill this time. For the first time in the history of the process, the House insisted we go to conference on the bill. Frankly, that is unfortunate. In the aggregate, the provisions of this bill represent a significant cost savings for U.S. manufacturers simply struggling to compete. We owe it to them to get the process back on track in the next Congress. I hope we can do that, and I promise to work very hard toward that end.

I wish to highlight two provisions in this bill in particular that will help my State of Montana remain competitive. One is a provision that eliminates the tariff on specialized components used by a Bozeman-based boot manufacturer called Schnee Shoes. This is a top-of-the-line company. They make the best

boots for hunting. If a hunter goes out pheasant hunting, duck hunting, you buy Schnee. They are terrific. They produce first-class products. Eliminating the tariff will save them tens of thousands of dollars a year and allow them to keep good-paying jobs in Bozeman, MT.

The other provision improves the competitiveness of U.S. wool. We produce a lot of wool in Montana—\$2 million a year. As other commodities and textiles, wool has faced an increasingly difficult marketplace over the past several years.

In response, U.S. wool growers adopted a positive approach to embrace world markets; that is, setting up a wool trust fund. Through the wool trust fund, first established in 2000, U.S. exports of wool have risen sixfold as a share of domestic production. This successful program of the wool trust fund is, unfortunately, scheduled to expire next year. But this bill renews the wool trust fund through the year 2007 and allows the United States and Montana wool growers to continue to compete.

I also want to speak about one other provision of this bill, normal trade relations with Laos, that I know has generated some controversy. I support granting normal trade relations to Laos. In the absence of normal trade relations, Laos is subject to average tariffs of 45 percent, with peaks of 60 to 90 percent for important Laotian products such as T-shirts and bamboo chairs.

In contrast, most U.S. trading partners, including Laotian competitors Burma, China, Cambodia, and Vietnam, face average tariffs of only 2.4 percent compared, again, with Laos of 45 percent.

Now, I know some of my colleagues oppose granting normal trade relations to Laos. They believe Laos must work harder on improving its human rights record before receiving normal trade relations. But normal trade relations, I must emphasize, is not a special privilege the United States grants only to certain countries, and it does not signify approval of a country's policies. It is not a free trade agreement or a preference program. Rather, it is the baseline economic relationship the United States has with virtually every other country in the world—the baseline.

In fact, there are only three countries on Earth that do not have normal trade relations: Cuba, North Korea, and Laos, and Laos is the only one of the three that has full, normal diplomatic relations with the United States.

Laos has worked with the United States closely in accounting for U.S. prisoners of war and missing in action in Laos during the Vietnam war, supported U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Southeast Asia after 9/11, and has cooperated in a long-term bilateral counternarcotics program.

Granting normal trade relations to Laos could have a dramatic effect on improving the dismal economic conditions in that country. Laos has the